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The Hour by Hour Story of an Eight Month Long Strike, 1966-1967

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The Hour by Hour Story of an Eight Month Long Strike, 1966-1967

Abstract

Typed, notes on the Carbide Strike and negotiations between the company and the union for the period August 18, 1966 to March 03, 1967.

Introduction

This book tells the hour by hour story of an eight month long strike.

The company gave the union its final proposal on August 18th, just 4 days before the termination of the agreement. The proposal addressed all the union's major demands and reflected small compromise towards all the union objectives. The company asked the union negotiating team to take the offer back to its members and recommend acceptance. The union management committee said it could not do that. Additional negotiations were not scheduled. The initial waiting game was on. The company was waiting to see the union's hand. It did not know what the union would do. It had dim hopes that the membership would pressure the leaders into accepting the offer and avoiding a strike. The union leaders, in an attempt to discredit the company's offer, passed out handbills at the gate. Let's pick up the action by going to the strike journal. They were concerned that the older women in the union would not follow their leadership. They felt that a united front of these people, plus some dissidents of the opposite political party in the union, could cause a stand-off in the union on the strike issue and make calling a strike impossible. The company hoped the union

members would not support their leaders and accept the agreement. Its first step was to tell its foremen to tell their workers that no lockout was being called and that the company was agreeing to a "day to day" extension of the agreement. This approach is common when a contract expires and no agreement is reached. In some cases, it is a means for the negotiators to continue talking without having the union leadership feel pressure from members who feel that no work should be done without a contract. This no contract no work slogan came out of the coal industry and is a popular attitude among militant unionists at negotiation time.

On the evening preceeding the day the contract terminated, the no contract no work advocates began to agitate at the gates. This caused great concern among the union leaders. The leaders had pledged to the national and other unions that its people would not go out until August 28th. However, the people were very micro oriented and didn't care about, or understand, their

allotted role in the international's and related union's coordinated bargaining effort. This attitude eventually played a most important role in the strike's conclusion and in later happenings. The attachment of an individual to his specific job is very strong when compared to his commitment to his class. This behavior is reflective of the lack of class consciousness of the American worker. More of it will be seen as the drama unfolds. (During the course of the strike, the union leadership is constantly fighting to keep the ranks of all *locals* in the strike closed. It is an easier job when the company angers to the pickets by *operating* the plant and less so when the ineffectiveness of their efforts become increasingly apparent to them. When their goals and those of the international conveying the locals unity job is made less difficult.)

When the mediator asked the company to meet with the union on the latter's request, the company was not certain why the union wanted the meeting and, therefore, refused to meet. It thought the union wanted to more concessions from it.

Hope sprung eternal in the company camp at that point. It was only when the mediator told the company that the meeting the union wanted was to formally reject the offer that the company agreed to meet and began to realize that its hopes were to be unfulfilled and that the union had stiffled into dissent sufficiently to successfully call a strike.

On August 28th, the company's worst fears were realized. The leaderships had managed to sell the idea of a coordinated strike to their constituents.

On August 29th, the first steps of all strike stratigists began to be employed: control ~~ingress~~ and ~~egress~~ to the plant. The union opened with a very simple but effective move. Since many of the workers lived locally and walked to work, the best way to keep any potential dissidents from entering the plant was to establish an aura of coercion. The ideal approach: a picket and a large dog. The game of "fetch" became a most potent weapon against pedestrians with a mind to enter the plant.

On the day after the contract terminated, the company sent a letter to the bargaining unit outlining its offer. It hoped it could split the union and get acceptance.

The company quickly decided to operate the plant. This was not planned. It had all along been hoping that no strike would take place. This decision was a knee jerk reaction to the strike. It was an emotional reaction. The problems of lack of planning were mitigated by the positive elements which made the operation possible: small unit products that could be easily shipped by mail or private car. Large numbers of exempt employees at the plant. (It was a high margin product that could afford over the hill personnel.) Large raw materials stock, and non-labor intensive operation.


The union then began to stop salesmen and similar people from entering the plant. They used more picketing to get their objective. Cars would not attempt to push through a line of pickets wandering in close ranks.

The company consolidated its attempt to operate the plant by establishing an attractive payment plan for management operators. It moved from high hopes to strong resolve. It showed no traces of uncertainty once the strike became a reality. The company decided to seek legal assistance in operating its plant. Its strategy was based on company rights in the law which enable a firm to get an order against picketing where such action affects the operation of the business and thereby causes financial loss to the firm. The stage was set to bring a truck of materials that were needed to continue operations, have it stopped by the pickets and seek relief from the courts on the backs of the *above right*. Little did the company know that its plans would be diverted and legal ~~strikes~~ would center on the conflict of company and union activities not connected with delivery of raw materials.

The company employed the practice of purchasing unfinished spare parts for equipment and having local subcontractors machine them into final form. The large scale purchasing power of the company enable

low cost price and finishing of such unfinished spare parts. The company decided to take its unfinished spare parts to its local processors in the company station wagon.

When the union was confronted with this challenge, they struck out violently. This was caused by the company's attempt to photograph pickets, their inexperience as pickets, the frustration of having their lines breached, and the apparent plans of the company to operate the plant for an extended period of time.



The initial involvement of the police was indicative of their future action in the strike. They were indecisive, fearful of the political ramifications of taking such, unsure of the law.

The police that initially arrived acted more on the basis of personal agitation by the failure of the pickets to obey other than a commitment to upholding a law that they were familiar with.

The union took up the gauntlet. They mass ~~picketed~~ picketed the gates. The first post negotiating meeting between a company representative and a union leader was quite *interesting*. When the company said it was not shipping product, the union seemed that its efforts were not for naught. It seems that the union was satisfied to let the management operators make product, as long as it was not shipped. This made them feel that when they returned, customers could be served without much delay and their strike would still cause the disruption of company receipts. It was the best of all possible strike worlds.

Chapter 2

The union members were incensed by the company's audacity concerning the station wagon and the police's involvement. They were going to show the company that they would not roll over and play dead. They attacked the station wagon and damaged it. It was inanimate and no one would be hurt. The company saw it as an outrageous attack on its rights and property. Again, the call to the police to protect their rights and apprehend the culprits

Introduction 2

Negotiations lasted for about eight weeks. Largely superficial. Union knew it would have to strike. People weren't sure. Union led them to believe they were striking for increased ~~Take~~ and milieu. Union striking for more power. We see divergence of interests here. Union's ability to get more and become stronger entity really was quite separate from milieu and dollars and cents attitude of workers. Leaders had to keep confusing issues to make people believe that their bread and butter issues were primary and union objective secondary. In fact, it was the other way around. However, when strike was called, it became difficult for workers to separate issues. Union kept them all in one bag, even though as strike wore on, workers really wanted bread and butter issues solved and didn't care much about union goal. However, as process wore on, company response took on holy war. Issues became clouded. Workers saw company attempt to defeat union objective as attempt to defeat workers objectives. Company placed in very difficult position. It tried to separate issues with letter campaign. Some success achieved, but union leadership was strong enough to keep workers from bargaining on local issues alone.

No leaders arose. Primarily because other work was available for leaders and they felt intimidated to challenge union leadership, were suspicious of company, in light of company response to strike, and other work kept them whole. Lessons: Strike is like rolling stone. It is difficult to stop without capitulating where workers are not mature in C. B. experience. Union leadership was strong and intimidating. Company response made workers suspicious. Other work made strike easier to bear. Legal recourse of company such that union attempts to shut down plant were blunted. Union efforts began to run afoul of the law.

However, company efforts also drew legal response by union.

Older workers and women suffered. They couldn't find other work.

Company operators were under extreme stress. Union held together till end. Resolution came when it

dropped its power increase objective.

Workers suffered. They didn't see strike objective of increased power as that important in long run.

Leaders eventually were seen as attached to location and company. They wanted something, but in last analysis wanted recognition, fairness in wages, and security to advance with company and their own neighborhood.

Let's pick up the action...